



# News Release

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## **West Nile virus requires monitoring to track areas of greater risk**

*New videos use humorous mosquito costume to promote prevention messages*

**OLYMPIA** — Mosquito season is in full swing throughout the state, so it's important to take steps to help you avoid mosquito bites to [reduce your risk of West Nile virus infection](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv_factsheet.htm) (www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/wnv\_factsheet.htm). Staying indoors at dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active is a good start.

“If your work puts you outdoors when mosquitoes are most active, it's important to avoid mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeve shirts and pants, and using an effective mosquito repellent on exposed skin,” said Maryanne Guichard, assistant secretary for the state Department of Health's environmental health division. “Preventing mosquito bites is your best defense against getting West Nile virus. Always read the labels on repellents and follow the instructions carefully, especially when you use them on children.”

Taking away mosquito larvae habitat by removing items that can hold standing water such as cans, buckets, wheelbarrows or toys will also discourage breeding mosquitoes. Water in wading pools, birdbaths, fountains, and animal troughs should be changed twice a week. Fix leaky faucets or sprinklers; repair or replace window and door screens that are damaged to limit the number of mosquitoes that get inside the home.

The Department of Health has created three short, humorous videos [promoting West Nile virus prevention](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa9aW_fpU1Q&feature=channel_video_title) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa9aW\_fpU1Q&feature=channel\_video\_title); the first of the three is online now and the other two will be posted over the summer.

West Nile virus is unpredictable and there's no way to know how much activity will be seen in a season in our state. No positive results have been found in Washington yet this summer. By this time last year, mosquito samples in Grant County had already tested positive for West Nile virus.

For some people, West Nile virus infection can be very serious, and even fatal. Some people may develop meningitis or encephalitis; some neurological effects may be permanent. Most people bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus won't become ill, yet some may have mild symptoms including headache and fever that go away without treatment. People over 50 and those with weak immune systems are at higher risk for serious illness.

Dead bird reporting is encouraged from May through October; it's easy to do on the agency's online [dead bird reporting system](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) or by contacting the [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm). Crows, ravens, jays, magpies, and hawks are particularly important to report because they often die from West Nile virus. Monitoring dead bird sightings allows state and local health agencies to identify unusual increases or clusters. Knowing these areas where West Nile virus may be a greater risk to people and animals will help target prevention and control efforts.

Horses are also susceptible to West Nile virus, but vaccines and an annual booster can protect them. The [Washington State Department of Agriculture](http://agr.wa.gov/News/2011/11-11.aspx) urges horse owners to contact their local veterinarian to learn about vaccinating horses (http://agr.wa.gov/News/2011/11-11.aspx).

More information is available on the agency's West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787) and on the [West Nile virus website](http://doh.wa.gov/WNV) (http://doh.wa.gov/WNV).

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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